

Body-mounted police cameras to be used as domestic violence evidence

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Police will be able to enter domestic violence scenes with body-mounted cameras and record abused victims, crying children, smashed-up rooms and any other signs of abuse, under legislation to be introduced to State Parliament on Tuesday.

In a nationwide first, video statements from the victim, taken at the scene, and powerful video footage taken in the immediate aftermath of domestic violence incidents, will be used as evidence in court cases.

Minister for Women Pru Goward said it would increase the success rate of domestic violence prosecutions.

"Relying on a video-recorded statement reduces the possibility of the perpetrator intimidating the victim by trying to coerce them into withdrawing or changing their original version of events," she said.

Tanya Whitehouse, chair of the Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service NSW, welcomed the move, saying it would empower victims, as long as they had a say in whether the video was used.

"Women go through a significant amount of stress and trauma when they attend court and, sometimes, that within itself can be enough to stop them attending," she said.

However, women's advocates have cautioned against relying too much on video footage, saying victims often say things in the heat of the moment they later regret. Inconsistencies are then used to discredit victims in court.

Robyn Cotterell-Jones, executive director of the Victims of Crime Assistance League and a domestic violence survivor, said frontline police often incorrectly identify victims as the perpetrator because a woman may shout something or scratch and hit a man in defence.

"Perhaps the use of videos, with training, might help this issue but who will assist the victim to know what to say, not say, and reflect trauma?" she said.

"The police, with no warning about her right not to self-incriminate, ask her 'did you do this? She's going to say 'Yes, but...' and try to explain but, too late, she has admitted."

Women's Legal Services NSW principal solicitor Janet Loughman said victims may only be able to recall details in calmer circumstances.

"It is important that this be recognised when assessing video evidence taken at the scene," she said.

Some frontline officers have been using video cameras for years as part of the police force's Domestic Violence Evidence Kits but the footage was not admissible, a legislative gap branded "ludicrous" by Assistant Commissioner Mark Murdoch in March.

Police Association president Scott Weber said the video kits will make officers' jobs easier and will be incredibly powerful for a magistrate "to be taken back to the traumatic incident and see the violence, see the room that has been smashed, see the children crying, see the devastation".

He said privacy concerns "went out the window" in situations such as domestic abuse. He hoped it would lead to the start of on-body cameras for all police at all times.

Police Minister Stuart Ayres said about \$100,000 would be spent on mandatory training for frontline police.

A victim must give his or her consent to be filmed and the perpetrator will have access to the video before trial under strict conditions.

"This legislation is victim-focused," Mr Ayres said. "The pressure on victims to recount incidents of violence at a later date in the sterile atmosphere of a courtroom will be substantially reduced."

Attorney-General Brad Hazzard, who will introduce the bill, said prosecutions often failed because victims did not want to be "retraumatished" by the court process.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/bodymounted-police-cameras-to-be-used-as-domestic-violence-evidence-20141020-118yb5.html>